

Duxbury Clipper,

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Revolutionary War

Here comes Fourth of July, complete with fire engines and band music, and floats decked out in the Duxbury Days paraphernalia. How many of us remember that this is Independence Day which we are celebrating, and that some of the things that we are celebrating took place here in our town?

One of the best parades that Duxbury ever had broke out, it was far from planned, in March 1766 when news came down the Bay Path that the English Parliament had repealed the hated Stamp Act that so outraged the colonial sense of freedom and justice. Half of the town's stock of gunpowder was distributed and used to express a loud noise of approval. The countrymen poured in from the fields to form a procession which marched up to a spontaneous meeting on the summit of Captain's Hill, hauling along six carriage guns, which thereupon banged out salutes to punctuate the humorous speeches of Joseph Russell, the town wit, as the crowd hanged Lord Greville, author of the act, in effigy.

By 1773 things had gone badly with the cause of freedom, and a Duxbury Committee of George Partridge, Capt. Wait Wadsworth, Deacon Peleg Wadsworth, Dr. John Wadsworth, and Bildad Arnold were drawing up "resolves and remonstrances" in support of the Town of Boston, which was bearing the brunt of the oppression. That year the first minute company was raised in Duxbury, and drilled by Major Jodah Alden. Ichabod Alden was chosen captain, with many Delanos, Spragues, Thomases and Wadsworths prominent as "private men". Duxbury's minute men soon joined Plymouth and the other surrounding towns to form a regiment.

In 1774 when General Gage sailed into Boston to take office as Governor General, he dissolved the General Court, but the members (including George Partridge, delegate from Duxbury) met anyway, in Cambridge, and then at Concord as the Provincial Congress; while at home the town voted to procure 35 firearms with bayonets "to defend ye town and country as need may require."

Marshfield, a stronghold of the Tories, looked askance at

such ominous preparations, and petitioned General Gage to send a detachment of soldiers for their protection. When 100 of the Queen's Guards under Capt. Balfour arrived and were quartered in the town, a written remonstrance from the Selectmen of Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury, Pembroke, Hanson, and Scituate was dispatched to the General, complaining of this invasion in times of peace. But the troops stayed on, together with the 300 stands of arms for the gentlemen of Marshfield, with which to defend themselves. The little army made occasional sorties from Marshfield, once surrounding the Meeting House at Duxbury during the course of Sabbath services and peering in the windows, to the considerable alarm of the worshipers.

As the tensions mounted, Captain Balfour considered an attack on Plymouth, where, like Concord, powder was stored; but in a conference at the house of Edward Winslow, Esq., was told by John Watson (of Clark's Island) that the colonials would fight "like devils", and gave up the idea. Following the bloodshed at Lexington, though, the shoe was on the other foot, and it was the militia that gathered to attack the redcoats. The Plymouth company under Capt. Mayhew, the Kingston company under Peleg Wadsworth, and the Duxbury company under Capt. George Partridge marched to the borders of Marshfield, some 500 men in all, who were soon augmented by Capt. Clapp's company from Rochester, and Capt. Harlow's from Plympton.

No attack was made that afternoon, much to the displeasure of some of the captains, especially Peleg Wadsworth; and in the dusk the British escaped to two sloops waiting for them at Brant Rock, leaving behind guards to watch the Americans. Even the guards got away, seizing two Duxbury men on the way to their boat; but a gun went off, alarming the countryside for miles around and letting the men escape. Capt. Balfour stated later that in the face of such odds he would have surrendered without firing a shot. Instead, he and his men were able to join the action at Bunker Hill and later at New York, and what might have been the glorious surrender at Marshfield was lost to the pages of history.